

New York Municipal Airport, Marine Air Terminal  
(La Guardia Airport, Marine Air Terminal)  
Adjacent to Bowery Bay  
Grand Central Parkway and 94th St.  
Jackson Heights  
Queens County  
New York

HAER No. NY-89

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

NY-89

NEW YORK MUNICIPAL AIRPORT, MARINE AIR TERMINAL

(LA GUARDIA AIRPORT, MARINE AIR TERMINAL)

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Date: circa 1940

Location: Adjacent to Bowery Bay, at La Guardia Aiport, Grand Central Parkway at 94th St., Jackson Heights, Queens County, New York.

Designer: William Adams Delano; Architect

Owner: Originally; City of New York  
Presently; Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

Significance: La Guardia Airport's Marine Air Terminal is one of the only surviving examples of terminals built especially for the service of "Clipper Ships", sea planes that routinely made Trans-Atlantic crossings during the late 30's. Designed and built as a WPA project, the building holds the distinction of having one of New York City's most noteworthy Art Deco interiors. Also of note is the mural "Flight" that adorns the wall of the building's circular waiting room. The mural stands as a representative example of the many works of art created through the Federal Arts Project, a Depression era program designed to put artists back to work.

Transmitted by: Dan Clement, 1983. Historical data drawn from National Register of Historic Places Nomination file.

In 1934, New York mayor, Fiorello La Guardia initiated studies into the possibility of constructing an airport terminal to service the growing New York City Metropolitan area. The result was the selection of 105 acres of land at North Beach, in Queens County (formerly the site of another airport that closed due to the Depression). The city acquired the property in 1937 and, with federal assistance through the W.P.A., opened New York Municipal Airport (later to be named La Guardia Airport) on October 15, 1939.

Besides regular trans-continental air service, La Guardia was also designed to handle trans-Atlantic "Clipper Ships", large seaplanes that routinely crossed the Atlantic to Europe. This service was provided in a specially designed marine air terminal located about one mile from the main terminal building. The "clippers" would taxi into Bowery Bay from Long Island Sound and then be towed to the terminal, which was built at the waters edge.

The building was designed in the Art Deco style by architect William Delano. His design kept the building simple, letting the ornamentation express the function, for example, the flying fish frieze around the outside. The interior contains a large two story circular central space with a graduated stepped ceiling and skylight. Most note worthy is a mural just below the lowest ceiling tier. Entitled "Flight", the 12'x237' mural was designed by James Brooks as part of the Federal Arts Project.

The terminal, unfortunately, became obsolete soon after opening for service. World War Two ended commercial trans-Atlantic service while the technological advances of aircraft design soon made the "clipper ship" a thing of the past. Today the building is still used as an air terminal but the large trans-Atlantic seaplanes have been replaced by small comuter airlines.

For those who are interested in more information on the Marine Air Terminal, La Guardia Airport or the Pan America Clipper Ship (designed by Boeing Air Craft) please see:

"Angelucci, E. Airplanes from the dawn of Flight to the Present Days, New York: McGrow Hill, 1973.

Arend, G. Air World's Great Airports: La Guardia 1939-79 New York: Air Cargo News, 1979.

Basset, Preston R. "Aviation on Long Island" In Paul Bailey, Long Island: A History of two Great Counties, Nassau Suffolk. New York: 1949.

"New York Municipal Airport -- A detailed description of the Great Air Terminal constructed by the W.P.A." New York: WPA 1939.